

Article 4: The Building Blocks of Thriving During a Global Pandemic

Planning, Adaptability & Compassion Allows a Florida Utility to Continue to Deliver Excellent Service

We've learned from doing this series that preparation, resilience, and quick thinking are helping companies across the United States navigate and thrive through this COVID-19 pandemic. We spoke with a contact center operations leader at a Florida-based power utility that serves 10 million people about how it continues to serve consumers during these challenging times.

While the company had crafted a pandemic plan back in 2009, there hadn't been a need for it until recent events. Their management's primary concern in developing the plan at that time was sanitation and implementing social distancing. As we all know now, the current crisis required a great deal more change, which required the team, including their partner GC Services, to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions. While much of the pandemic plan elements were used, the company also leveraged aspects of its stop-disruption plans, which contemplated agents having to work from home. So while neither of these plans was followed to the letter, both of them contributed to the resilience of service delivery, the company was able to provide.

When the potential emerged of mandated closure of, or drastically reduce occupancy within, existing centers, the team rapidly assessed its technical readiness. Fortunately, the company had already enacted critical elements required to enable a productive work-at-home service model:

1. A Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) was in place, meaning agents could access the company's essential systems through a secure connection from home or other off-site locations;
2. It had increased the capacity for employees to securely connect to the company network from outside their existing facilities; and
3. It had issued laptop computers to most agents, allowing them to get set up to work at home rapidly.

While much was ready for the mass shift to work-at-home, there were some challenges to overcome. One of their teams was connected directly to their system, not yet leveraging the VDI, so IT teams had to expand their capacity and quickly reconfigure those agents' computers. The rollout of laptops was not as far along with the company's BPO partner, GC Services. However, both companies quickly responded by socially distancing the team, still working in centers while deploying laptops for the staff.

Through advanced planning, rapid response to obstacles, and excellent teamwork, the companies were able to have 98% of their employees working from home within a short period. Not only did these

actions help keep employees safe, but it also allowed the company to continue to serve its power customers during these stressful times.

Communications

A healthy communication plan has allowed the customer service team to deliver a high level of service during an extremely fluid situation. Daily team calls keep the entire management team updated on recent news and updates while surfacing and conquering any challenges that emerge. Of primary importance is keeping home agents informed of critical service issues and policy changes that impact how they should be interacting with consumers. The company uses a variety of communication methods to ensure all teams are aligned on the current status and policies. With so many ongoing changes such as payment extensions, bill reductions, and charge removals for their customers, agents must be kept in the loop. Diligent quality control has allowed the company and GC Services to identify and rapidly close any communication gaps.

Internal communications during this time are critical as well. Given the magnitude of changes and information and the stress of working through a pandemic, the company took steps to ensure its employees knew they weren't alone. One example is thank you notes that are regularly sent to team members, letting them know that their efforts for customers are noticed and appreciated.

Training

The training was also a challenge as the pandemic hit just as the service team was ramping up seasonal hiring. The GC Services team quickly adjusted the training plan, limiting the initial training class sizes to only ten people, to accommodate social distancing requirements while ensuring essential skills and practices are absorbed. New representatives then complete the training at home, which provides a smooth transition to their eventual working situation.

Planning, Adaptability & Compassion

We see the fundamental ingredients for success in this great utility. Their advanced planning is the foundation for their success in avoiding significant customer service disruption. Additionally, management's ability to work with internal and external partners to quickly identify and work to overcome challenges is the second key ingredient to success. And finally, the culture of compassion for customers and agents ensures they prioritize the needs of their frontline service staff who are the face and voice to the customer. GC Services is proud to partner with this company and to deliver excellent service outcomes during these challenging and stressful times.